



Delivering our Customer Promise

Our annual report to customers 2020 to 2021



orbitcustomerhub.org.uk

Welcome

What a difference a year makes. It's been over a year since we first entered lockdown and while we are now seeing certain restrictions easing and life returning to some sense of normality, the past 15 months have been extremely challenging for everyone.

The enormity of the task to keep you - our customers – and your homes and neighbourhoods safe and supported throughout lockdown has not been taken lightly, and our teams have worked tirelessly to deliver everything from essential repairs and maintenance to wellbeing checks.

During this time, communication and engagement were more important than ever. We made tens of thousands of welfare calls to our customers and where possible, we maintained our presence on our estates. We also helped others in the community who were making a difference, making donations and supporting local foodbanks and community groups.

Following feedback from you, we have made significant improvements to our digital service. We launched a brand-new customer **website** followed by our new myAccount portal. This online tool allows you to report repairs more easily and view your account information.

We've also simplified our organisational structure to help us work more efficiently. More details can be found by visiting our customer **website**.

Delivering the best customer service we can remains our absolute aim. Our new Customer Promise has a clear purpose: 'to help you and your communities to thrive'. The new Promise contains four clear commitments: delivering an excellent customer experience; providing high quality safe and sustainable homes; bringing positive change to places and communities; and working together for a better day.

In our Customer Promise we prioritise safety and value for money, while addressing environmental challenges, by making our homes more energy efficient. We also commit to being inclusive, valuing the diversity of the communities we work in.

This has been, without doubt, the most challenging time for everyone. We know how much you rely on us to be a great landlord and we also know we don't always get things right. However, we are listening and striving to improve, and hopefully you will recognise this through our actions during this difficult period, and through the commitments we are making in our Customer Promise.

I look forward to your ongoing feedback and I hope that you enjoy reading this report.

Kind regards,

Paul Richards
Group Director of
Customer and Communities



Welcome message from Fiona, one of our Engaged Customers in Warwickshire



“This last year has been unique, and changed the way we work with Orbit to bring the customers’ voice to the forefront. Despite the pandemic, Engaged Customers were still involved in a whole number of ways. We continued to be included in policy making, as well as challenging and holding Orbit to account, so that services can continue to be improved for all customers.”

- Fiona, from Warwickshire, who is a member of our Engaged Customer Group

In more normal times, Engaged Customers use a combination of Your Voice, Orbit’s online platform, and face-to-face meetings, to share customer feedback. Because of the pandemic, everything had to move online. One positive was we were able to get to know other residents from all over the country, but it also meant we needed to learn to collaborate in a different way, and it sometimes proved challenging.

Senior managers have been involved in meetings, which has given everyone more insight into how things work and fit together. With management’s support, Engaged Customers have contributed to the following:

- Helping to shape Orbit’s new Customer Promise, which puts customers at the heart of everything Orbit does
- Reviewing the Government’s ‘Social Housing White Paper’, which focuses on customer voice and influence, to help Orbit achieve greater accountability

- Creating an EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) survey for customers to feed into via Your Voice, to ensure Orbit’s services are accessible to everyone
- Learning more about the work of Orbit’s Tenancy Sustainment team, and how the introduction of a Tenancy Intervention Officer has helped support new customers who may be struggling with a new tenancy, particularly during the pandemic.

This year, we plan to look at how Orbit ends tenancies with customers, and review the policies and procedures that go with that. We will also review how Orbit works with contractors, and how systems and communications can work together effectively to improve our customers’ experience.

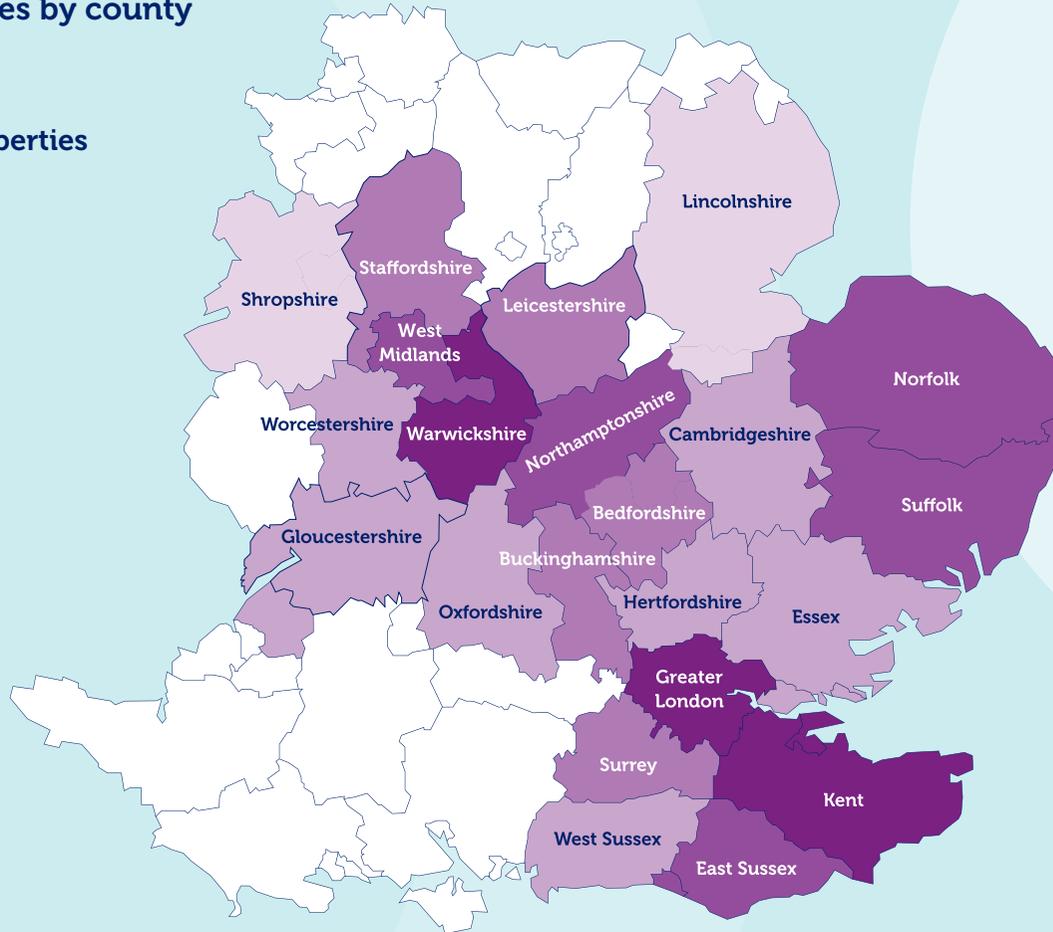
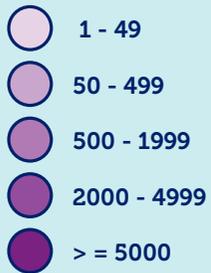
To find out how you can
get involved, please visit
[orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/
getinvolved](https://orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/getinvolved)



Our property breakdown

Orbit properties by county

Number of properties



We are committed to delivering our Customer Promise and building thriving communities. Our aim is to provide good quality housing that you can be proud to call home, whilst investing in your communities to make them great places to live in. Over the last 12 months, we've invested **£64.2m** in existing homes, to ensure they are more modern and efficient. We remain committed to meeting quality, safety, environmental and design standards, so that you, our customers, live in modern, well maintained homes.



Our new Customer Promise

Helping our customers and their communities to thrive

Delivering an excellent customer experience

- Be easy to deal with, resolve your queries and keep our promises
- Be fair, inclusive and value diversity
- Ensure our services offer good value for money



Providing high quality, safe and sustainable homes

- Build and maintain high quality affordable homes to be proud of
- Maintain the highest safety standards
- Invest to deliver a lower carbon future



Bringing positive change to places and communities

- Involve you in decisions about your home and neighbourhood
- Keep your local area clean, green and safe
- Provide support to improve wellbeing and independence



Working together for a better day

- Listen to truly understand your priorities
- Be professional in everything we do
- Help you to have a better day



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Key

In each section we show how we have performed against our targets.

The colours indicate:



We achieved our target



We were close to achieving our target



We did not achieve our target



Click this icon at the bottom of the pages to return here



2020-21 highlights



4.2 out of 5 overall customer satisfaction

(increase from 4.1 in 2019-20)



Over 45,000 homes, 848 brand new homes



£64.2m invested in repairs, home improvements, customer safety and heating/electrics



21% reduction in our carbon footprint since 2018-19 and a switch to 100% renewable electricity in our offices and communal areas



914 customers helped through employment and skills training



3,039 coaching sessions on jobs, training and volunteering



101 customers found employment with our support



559 customers were supported with their mental wellbeing via our free wellbeing support programmes





**Delivering
an excellent
customer
experience**

Customer Engagement

Our customers make a real difference, by getting involved and helping us to shape our services, voting on our online polls, taking part in local activities, or sitting on our Housing Association Board.

Together with Tenants

This year, we co-created our approach to Together with Tenants. In consultation with several working groups, we completed a self-assessment against the charter commitments, to look at where we need to improve and to help shape our communications and new Complaints policy.

Scrutinising our services

Our scrutiny champions meet regularly, to review our performance and customer feedback, and to decide on scrutiny topics. We collect data and insight to help get a better understanding of topics, and support our customers in getting involved, so that we can find solutions together.

Our Virtual Customer Inspection activity won the Delegates' Choice award at the National Housing Maintenance Forum (NHMF) Conference Awards 2021

Your Voice is an online platform where we engage with our customers, on the topics that matter to you. It provides an opportunity for you to feedback on your experiences, make recommendations for improvement, and help to influence our future decisions, through surveys, polls, and discussion forums.



This year we introduced a brand-new virtual activity, which provides our customers with an opportunity to hold us to account and improve the standard of the homes we let. Videos of homes for re-let are filmed and posted on the platform and a survey function allows our customers to provide feedback. This gives us vital feedback that improves those all important first impressions when our customers move into their new homes.



Customer Engagement - continued

Your Voice Communities

We have introduced Your Voice communities, which provide an opportunity to engage with your local neighbourhood, scheme, or community. Local events, information and estate inspection dates are regularly posted, and you can tell us what you would like to improve in the area you live.

Your Voice virtual conference

We delivered our first ever virtual conference, bringing together customers, senior Orbit leaders and our Board to engage on a variety of topics, helping to shape our new Customer Promise.



Head over to our **get involved page** to find out more about our activities and how you can have your voice heard.

*Across a range of channels such as conference call, webinars and through our digital engagement platform (Your Voice) on a range of topics.



Lettings

Last year, we welcomed 2,171 new customers into a new home with us, either in a re-let or a brand-new home. Customers who experienced a good first impression of us as a landlord has remained steady at a score of 4.2 out of 5.

- Tracey Savory, Head of Lettings

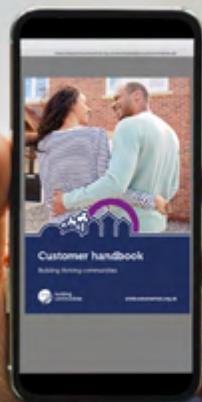
Following a full review of our empty home repairs and lettings services, we introduced new ways of working, to help our customers taking up new tenancies. We revised all of our communications (letters, emails and texts), and worked with our Engaged Customers to make sure our communications are clear and easy to understand.

We developed a new customer handbook, which provides an overview of all our services in one helpful booklet. It outlines our responsibilities as your landlord, as well as your responsibilities as our tenant. This is given to all new customers at the start of their tenancy and is available online for our existing customers.

Our focus this year is to reduce the number of empty homes so that we have more homes available for people who need them. We also need to manage the increased demand of mutual exchange applications that built up during the pandemic. We will explore how we can improve our digital offer around mutual exchanges and how we can further improve our communications to customers throughout their application. Following customer feedback about the challenges and costs of starting a new tenancy with no furniture, we will trial a small pilot where we will offer some new customers tenancies with pre-furnished homes.

- **4.2 of out 5** is the rating from our new customers who experienced a good first impression of us (compared to **4.2** last year)
- **96.3** days is the average amount of time taken to re-let one of our empty properties, compared to **59.4** days in 2019-20, although this is due to not being able to let as many homes during the pandemic
- **97.8%** of our properties currently occupied (compared to **98.1%** last year).

[orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/
customerhandbook](https://orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/customerhandbook)



Scan the QR code to find the most up to date version of the handbook on our website



Rent

Building thriving communities is our vision, and the rent you pay helps us achieve this together. This includes providing maintenance and improvements to your homes, building much needed new affordable homes for people who need them, and a range of support services for everyone.

- Kath Buxton, Head of Income Collection and Recovery

Every year, we carry out a review of the rent and other charges you pay. We increase your rent in line with Government legislation. For the majority of rented customers, we increased your rent to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) plus **1%**. Last year's September CPI was **0.5%**, which meant most customers' rent increased by **1.5%**.

Last year, we took a more flexible approach to managing rent arrears. When customers contacted us for help, we worked with them to give the support they needed. If you're ever struggling with your rent, please do let us know as we're here to help.

If you're experiencing any difficulty paying your rent please let us know - we're here to help and there are a number of options to support you if you're struggling.

Thank you to the 97.8% of customers who pay their rent on time.

This helps us to keep collection costs down and allows us to focus on delivering better services and improving your homes.



Service charges

Better collaboration between our Service Charge team and Property Managers has resulted in more efficient ways to manage your service charges, so statements are issued earlier.

- Peter Cook, Head of Service Charge

Engaged Customers helped us to review our new service charge policy. One recommendation was that customers are involved in helping us award new service contracts from start to finish. This includes reviewing the contract details, the specification of the work to be completed, meeting with potential contractors and reviewing their proposals regarding quality of work and costs.

Our Service Charge Officers are also working more closely with Property Managers to review, verify and amend each estate budget, focusing on the requirements of each individual estate. This has resulted in more accuracy and transparency with service charge costs and a reduced number of customer enquiries.

Through Your Voice, our Engaged Customer platform, we held a session where we explained in more detail how our management fee is calculated. We've listened to your feedback, and are using this to improve how we explain the management fee breakdown to all our customers when we issue our new budgets next February.



In the future, we plan to work more closely with customers at a local level. This will include sharing copies of draft budgets and year-end statements before issuing them. If you're interested in getting involved, please just let us know. We'd love to hear from you.

Period	2020-2021	2021-2022	Number of enquiries	Percentage increase or decrease
April	650	586	64	-9.85%
May	563	450	113	-20.07%
June	488	384	104	-21.31%



Value for money

We work hard to make sure we provide good value for money and use our resources to deliver the best services for you. At the heart of our business, we believe homes matter to everyone and we operate with a 'profit for a purpose' to build responsible, safe, affordable, good quality and energy

efficient homes. We also aim to create diverse and thriving communities to help you feel safe and supported.

Key highlights achieved last year as a result of our value for money culture, with a focus on economy, efficiency and effectiveness:

Economy

How products and services are purchased in the right quantity, at the right price, whilst ensuring quality standards:

- **25.4%** operating margin
- **£2.1 million** savings on purchasing products and services

Efficiency

A productivity measure considering to show how efficiently projects are delivered:

- **97.8%** home occupancy
- **100.5%** rents collection, reducing rent arrears.

Effectiveness

We measure our effectiveness and quality of work by assessing our success and the wider impact that has:

- **4.2 out of 5** overall customer satisfaction
- **Multi award-winning company** RoSPA Gold status for customer Health & Safety, Housing Forum Delegate's Choice award, Leaders in Safeguarding Accreditation
- **201 hours** of staff volunteering
- By supporting **1,111 customers** through our myMoney Better Days programme, we helped these customers increase their income by **£550,900** in total and assisted them to manage **£987,000 of debt.**



Customer Service Centre

Our aim for last year was to deliver a clear and consistent service to all customers and ensure that your queries were dealt with effectively. Despite the challenges the pandemic presented, we continued to deliver a full service to customers. In addition to being responsive to nearly 400,000 incoming calls and queries, we also made 11,000 outbound calls to see whether you required any additional support.

- Michael Peniket, Head of Customer Service Centre (CSC)

Last year, we focussed on training and developing our colleagues in the Customer Service Centre to improve the overall experience you receive when contacting us. This has included investing in new tools that regularly test team members on their skills and knowledge to develop their learning and improve how they manage your calls.

We're also supporting the career development of our teams through more structured personal development goals and targets. We have already started to see some of the benefits of investing in our people and last year, 16 colleagues from our Customer Service Centre were promoted into new roles and an additional six members of the team are completing NVQ qualifications in Customer Services.



How our Customer Service Centre performed:

Overall customer satisfaction with the Customer Service Centre
4.36 out of 5
(compared to **4.3** in 2019-2020)

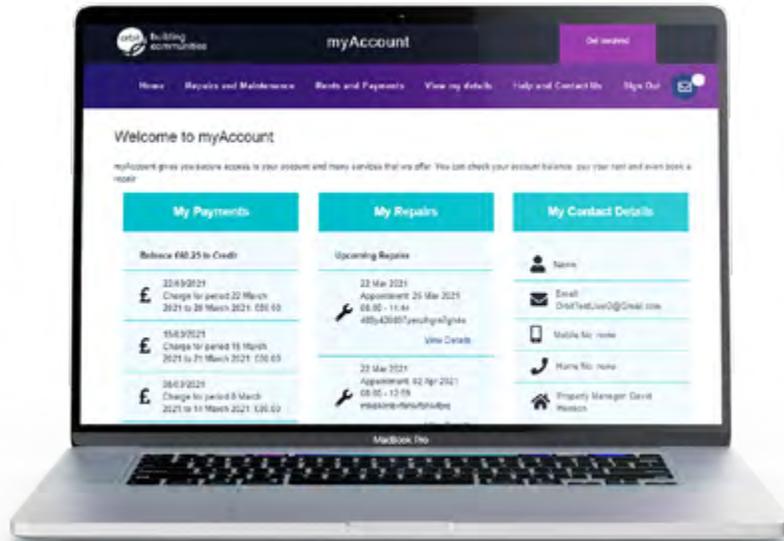
Call abandonment rate –
2019-20 - **22%**,
2020-21 - **10.8%**

As we seek to improve our digital services, we also responded to **3,000** live chat conversations via the 'contact us' webpage on our new customer website.

Our frontline teams handled a total of **490,000** inbound queries (both phone and digital) from customers. We improved on our overall call abandonment rate for the year, with the number of calls that we did not reach reducing from **22%** in 2019-20 to **10.8%** in 2020-21.

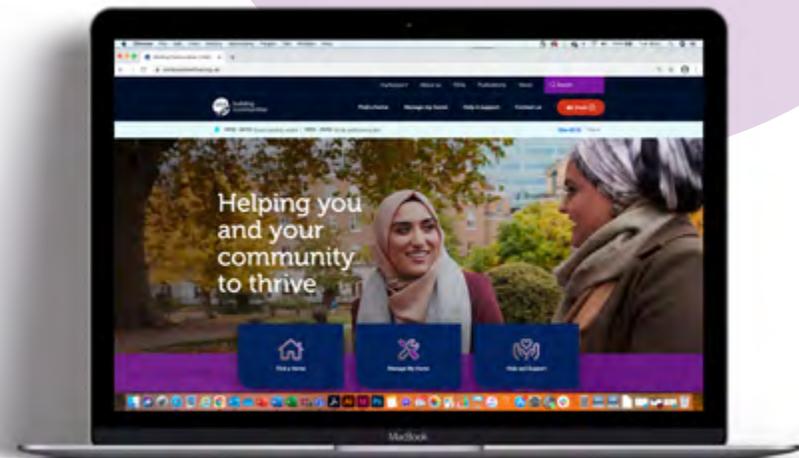


Customer Service Centre - continued



You told us that our website could be easier to use and navigate, so we worked with customers to develop an all new customer website. Key features include an improved homepage so that you can find what you're looking for more easily. We've also refreshed our news section and we've also introduced a chatbot feature called 'Celeste' that guides you through your most commonly asked questions. If you haven't already done so, check out your new website by visiting orbitcustomerhub.org.uk.

We've introduced a new and improved **myAccount** online portal where you can report a repair, check your balance, make payments, setup a Direct Debit or get in touch directly with any enquiries you may have. You can also update your contact details, get involved in shaping our services and update your communication preferences so that we are able to keep you updated with the information that you want to receive.



Complaints

Our Customer Promise outlines our commitment to deliver excellent services and high-quality homes. We recognise that sometimes things can go wrong and when this happens, we work with our customers to put the matter right as quickly as possible. We've made our complaints processes clearer, so our customers can raise their concerns. Complaints have gone up as demand for our services increased during the pandemic, and also due to our more open approach to encouraging complaints and feedback as part of the new 'Housing Ombudsman Code'.

- Louise Palese, Director of Customer Services

Last year, we worked with the sector-leading 'Together with Tenants' programme and we worked with our customers, to see how we could improve the complaint process for them. This has led to the creation of our new customer-led complaints policy.

We have also created a new structure. Informal and stage one formal complaints continue to be managed by our Customer Services team, whilst stage two and Housing Ombudsman cases are now handled by our new Customer Experience team. This ensures that stage two complaints are reviewed with a fresh pair of eyes.

1,410 complaints received, compared to **893** in 2019-20 (an increase of **517** or **57.9%**)

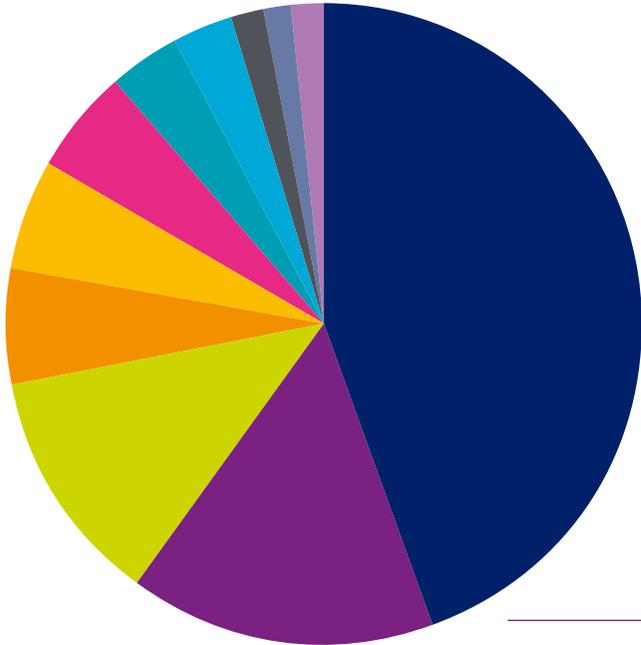
- We substantially reduced the average number of working days we target to respond to formal complaints from **25** to **13**
- **95.8%** resolved within timescales (**91%** last year) 
- **0.6%** of customers who had a complaint dealt with informally, wanted to escalate it to a formal complaint
- **37** cases investigated by the Housing Ombudsman.*

*Some of these relate to complaints reported in 2019-20



Complaints - continued

Formal complaints received by customers:



● **598** – Responsive repairs (44%)

● **207** – Compliance (includes safety works and testing) (15%)

● **161** – Housing services (including community safety and anti-fraud, lettings and responses relating to tenancy breaches, evictions, new customers etc.) (12%)

● **80** – Property management (6%)

● **72** – Income services (rent) (5%)

● **71** – Service charges (5%)

● **50** – Estate Services (4%)

● **42** – New homes and development (3%)

● **20** – Home ownership (1%)

● **19** – Capital delivery (home improvements) (1%)

● **21** – Other (including insurance, Customer Service Centre, leaseholder complaints, information governance) (2%)



Complaints - continued

Housing Ombudsman determinations

We received 37 ‘determinations’ that the Housing Ombudsman identified as areas for us to improve our service. A ‘determination’ is the Ombudsman’s final decision, that we must comply with.

We recognise that we saw more maladministration cases than the sector average, some of which is down to historical cases coming through in the year. We have already made steps by working with our Engaged Customers to address this and expect a greatly improved performance to show in next years figures.

A ‘maladministration’ is a formal decision made by the Ombudsman, where they determine that a landlord has failed to do something; done something they shouldn’t have or delayed responding to a complaint unreasonably. A ‘partial maladministration’ is where an aspect of the investigation is found to be a maladministration, but it doesn’t apply to the entire complaint.

We’ve used feedback from the Housing Ombudsman to improve our complaints process and we are starting to see improvements already.

All potential compensation payments are reviewed using a new compensation calculator to make sure customers receive fair and consistent compensation payments. We’ve also been checking our complaints handling codes with those of the Housing Ombudsman to make sure complaints are investigated more thoroughly.

	2019-2020	Orbit 2020-21	
Determination Outcome	Landlords with more than 10,000 homes**	Volume	Percentage
Maladministration*	24%	31	83.8%
Partial maladministration	15%	0	0.0%
Severe maladministration	0%	1	2.7%
No maladministration	32%	3	8.1%
Redress (compensation)	17%	1	2.7%
Resolved with intervention	1%	0	0.0%
Outside jurisdiction	10%	1	2.7%
Withdrawn	1%	0	0.0%
Total	100%	37	100%

*includes service failures

**Housing Ombudsman Landlord Performance Data Reports 20-21. The Housing Ombudsman splits landlords into three categories based on size: less than 1,000 homes, between 1,000 and 10,000 homes and over 10,000 homes. We’ve included the figures for landlords with more than 10,000 home as that’s the category we sit in, so the information is an accurate like for like comparison.





**Providing
high quality,
safe and
sustainable
homes**



Working together to improve your neighbourhood

“We manage our public spaces more effectively when our customers and teams come together. By delivering a coordinated ‘taskforce’ approach, we aim to improve the look, management and design of your communities.

- Greg Birch, Head of Property Management and Estate Services

Our Property Managers completed **16,330** tasks last year, including cleaning, repair and maintenance requests. **4,479** (or **98%**) estate inspections were carried out on time and in line with social distancing legislation. **290 (8%)** of these inspections took place alongside Engaged Customers.

We launched a pilot SMS texting service to notify Engaged Customers of estate inspections. This proved so successful that we are putting plans in place to offer this service for all our customers with communal facilities who may wish to take part.

We’ve also made a number of other improvements over the last year:

- In addition to face-to-face meetings, we’ve also launched online webinars with many of our customers. We plan on recording future webinars, so our customers can watch them at a time to suit them and give feedback.
- To reduce the fire risk in communal areas, we issued **549** legal notices to customers who left items stored in communal areas.
- We’ve installed new noticeboards in **75%** of our schemes and will have them in all schemes by the end of September 2021. This will provide a useful source of local information for our customers.
- A trial estate planned improvement programme has been developed, in consultation with our Engaged Customers. Together, we aim to carry

out small to medium sized improvements that will enhance the communal areas on our estates. This includes replanting ‘empty’ flower beds, putting in play equipment, installing raised planters, enlarging bin stores, establishing bike and mobility scooter stores and improving security measures (gates, fences, additional lighting). Customers will continue to be involved in drawing up improvement programmes for their estate each year.

- Engaged Customers have joined our procurement project teams, to help us scrutinise new contracts for grounds maintenance and car parking management. We will work with Engaged Customers to monitor delivery of the new grounds maintenance contract. We intend to develop an app that can be used by Engaged Customers, Property Management and Estate Services.
- This year, Engaged Customers have helped us look at new contracts for grounds maintenance in the South, along with aerial maintenance and vermin and pest control.
- Customers have been consulted on our new Property Management procedures to help define how Property Managers deliver key services, such as estate inspections, pest control and car parking management. The procedures act as clear guidelines for both our customers and employees, so there is consistency in delivery.



Independent Living

Following a substantial customer feedback exercise in 2019 where we surveyed over 1,200 customers and a review of how Independent Living operates, our new employee structure went live in October 2020. We're pleased to say that as part of the many improvements from this organisational change, we now have a designated employee for each of our Independent Living schemes.

- Jackie Kennedy, Head of Independent Living - Service Delivery



We have undertaken a significant skills and suitability appraisal programme with our teams, culminating in all employees within Independent Living completing a development plan to demonstrate their competency for the role they deliver. We have also provided additional training for our employees to raise repairs more promptly on behalf of customers.

- Number of wellbeing calls made by the teams during the pandemic – **5,000 calls per week**
- Total number of food parcels arranged by employees for customers – **60 per week**
- Number of referrals made to supporting agencies – **216 to Better Days** and **over 600 to other external support agencies**, such as food banks and befriending services.

We have also been investing in our schemes, with Warden Call Systems replaced in 15 of our schemes. This gave our customers the ability to more easily call or video each other, reducing social isolation.

What the future holds

We will be working with our colleagues in the Customer Engagement team to look at new ways of ensuring our customers have a voice, so they can support in influencing our policies, procedures and service.

We will roll out our new 'How are you?' procedure, replacing the existing wellbeing procedure, to better meet the needs of our customers.

We will be working with Wellbeing Managers to consider various activities and wellbeing initiatives for all those aged 55+ and promote these initiatives across our Independent Living schemes, in order to enhance wellbeing and help reduce isolation and loneliness.



Responsive repairs

“Despite the obvious challenges faced by our Responsive Repairs team over the last year, we continued to provide a repairs service throughout the pandemic. Our focus was to ensure we completed repairs and prepared homes for new customers whilst applying coronavirus safe practices, so all our customers, employees and contractors remained safe. ”

- David Jones, Head of Responsive Repairs

Our repairs contractors received over **103,000** repair requests and **2,271** jobs to prepare empty homes for new customers, whilst meeting customer satisfaction targets. As not all repairs were able to be completed due to coronavirus restrictions, we are currently working through a backlog to complete them.

Responsive repairs highlights

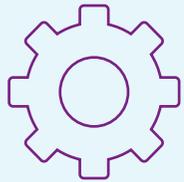
- Where we have mobile numbers, our contractors are now texting customers to confirm appointment dates, send reminders and let you know their estimated time of arrival
- We have identified customers who may be more vulnerable and need additional security measures in their homes such as additional locks, extra lighting, reinforced doors and windows locks
- We've worked with our repairs contractors to provide custom fire safety training for employees, so they can help identify any potential fire safety issues and we can put control measures in place to reduce the fire risk
- We've empowered our contractors to manage issues of asbestos when completing repairs in our homes, so they can work directly with specialist contractors to test and remove any asbestos safely and more quickly.



Responsive repairs - continued

Key actions for this year

- Manage the increased demand for repairs
- Carry out a full end-to-end repairs process review
- Customers now have the ability to raise repairs through our online portal, myAccount
- We've made changes to our customer satisfaction measurement tool (real time feedback), so that we can capture and action any incomplete repairs more quickly.



£31.2m invested in responsive repairs



103,000 repair requests received



2,271 empty homes made ready for new customers



3.87/5 repairs customer satisfaction target achieved against a target of 3.90



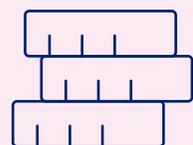
Home improvements

Because of the pandemic, we had to scale back our home improvement delivery programme, which included kitchens and bathrooms, as they take several days to complete. Instead, we focused on completing essential works that didn't require us to enter customers' homes for long periods of time. Before the colder winter months set in, we were able to replace 387 boilers and 325 storage heaters.

- Mark Drury, Head of Capital Delivery

Last year, the team developed a new way of working, to make sure our customers remained safe while working in your homes. For everyone's safety, we only completed projects where our contractors entered customers' homes for short periods of time. We worked closely with our contractors to make sure they followed Government guidance and called customers in advance of appointments to carry out advance risk assessments and answer any queries.

This included asking questions about a customer's individual circumstances and whether or not they were shielding. Whilst this did pose some challenges to carrying out home improvements and repairs, it ultimately ensured the safety of all of our customers during the pandemic.



Last year we spent £16.9m on home improvements, compared to £48m in 2019-20



892

new kitchens



484

new bathrooms



1,669

domestic boilers



670

storage heaters



Customer safety

Our priority is to keep you safe in your home and throughout the pandemic, we remained every bit as focused on carrying out over £10m of safety enhancements to your homes over the last year. We have also expanded our Customer Safety team to ensure we have the best people possible working to keep you and your family safe.

- Neil Yeomans, Head of Customer Safety



Scan the QR code to find our fire safety app and take the tour

We became the first housing association to win a hat-trick of Gold awards for customer safety from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA). The RoSPA Gold award is an incredibly difficult award to win, so winning it three years in a row is a major achievement and demonstrates our safety standards are amongst the highest in the country.

One of the key requirements of the RoSPA Gold award is to show that we're always actively trying to improve safety standards. As one example, last year we sponsored a new fire safety tool, that allows you to take a virtual tour of your flat, identifying common fire hazards and showing you how you can reduce the risk to you and your family. We worked in partnership with Firemark, a specialist fire safety organisation, to create a new fire hazard interactive tour. We've already had more than a quarter of a million views and received excellent feedback from customers. To take the tour yourself, please visit our new customer [website](#).

Last year, we achieved:



97.6% compliance with regards to electrical safety tests



23,000 critical safety inspections
(including all fire equipment, PAT testing and lightning protection)



25,819 gas safety checks



1,198 asbestos surveys



967 water safety assessments



Energy efficiency

Many of us have spent more time in our homes in the last year, making our home more important than ever before. We have continued our energy investment programme to ensure all our homes are safe, warm and affordable.

- Rebecca Heise, Head of Portfolio Investment

We are committed to achieving net zero carbon. Sustainability is built into our investment plans and our approach focuses on first improving the fabric of each home (such as wall and loft insulation and energy efficient doors and windows) to make sure they are as insulated as possible. A well-insulated home should allow you to benefit from increased comfort and reduced heating costs. Energy efficiency works are taking place across the all our regions and are focusing on all homes that are below Band C.

We have established a Carbon Forum to tackle our carbon footprint and lead on delivering our Net Zero Carbon Strategy. The Forum incorporates an Innovation Hub that will trial new technologies including PV roof panels with battery storage that will enable any electricity generated to be stored and used in the property at a later point.

In Stratford-upon-Avon, we secured £1.45m of Government funding to retrofit 69 homes to help them achieve net zero carbon outcome. The project, which is being delivered in partnership with Stratford District Council, is looking at a range of solutions for the different types of homes across Stratford. This work will not only make homes more energy efficient, but it also makes for better ventilation, heating efficiency and cooling in the summer. We are investing a further £2.2 million to the project, which is already underway.

- **80.39%** of our homes already achieve an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) of Band C or higher; our target is for all homes to meet this standard by 2030
- In 2020-21, **99.91%** of our homes met the Governments Decent Homes Standard.



By working with the District Council, we will help be able to help customers in Stratford benefit from a more energy efficient home. This project will allow us to drive real innovation in response to the challenges that present themselves when retrofitting sustainable technologies to a home. It is our aim to take the lessons that we learn from this work into to our ongoing home improvement programmes.

- Paul Richards, Group Director of Customer and Communities



Caring for our planet

We have made real progress with our carbon footprint. Since we first began calculating in 2018-19, we have achieved 21% reduction. This is due to actions like using more fuel-efficient vehicles, purchasing renewable electricity and improving energy efficiency in our communal areas and homes.

- David March, Head of Environmental Sustainability



2020-21 saw further progress on our environmental programme, Orbit Earth, which centres around our three main commitments:



Climate action to become net zero carbon

We recently conducted a survey with over 900 of our customers on climate change and environmental issues, to explore how we can support each other to live more sustainably. We are now reviewing our delivery plans and developing a programme of customer engagement to continue this conversation and ensure our services and programmes put the customer at the heart of our decision-making. You told us:



- **79%** of you are concerned about climate change



- Living in a home with low or no negative impact on the environment is important to **84%** of you



- Having access to green space within a 10 minute walk (**92%**), to safe walking and cycling routes (**87%**) and the ability to charge an electric vehicle (**50%**) are also important to you



- **92%** of you think its important that we make decisions to protect the environment. (We do, too!)



Caring for our planet - continued



Enhancement of outdoor spaces to improve the quality of natural resources including biodiversity, land, water and air

We have formed a partnership with Wildlife Trusts to help us improve our outdoor communal spaces for nature and wildlife, whilst also making sure they are places where you can enjoy spending time to improve your health and wellbeing. We are currently conducting pilots on a few estates to identify a range of suitable improvements to help us support nature's recovery. These may include changing the way we care for them, so they provide better habitats for birds and insects, as well as creating new areas like wild flowerbeds to welcome more bees and butterflies into our communities.



- We planted 1,020 trees and hedges at Applegarth House in Erith.
- Transformed an underutilised corner in Tanyard Farm, Coventry into a beautiful pollinator-friendly 'pocket park'.
- At Pathways Care Farm in Lowestoft, we're helping customers become more green by teaching them how to grow vegetables and how to compost.



Sustainable consumption to manage resources, materials and products responsibly

Meeting our environmental goals means working with others, and we've formed relationships with partners who share our environmentally responsible vision. This includes:

- Our partnership with Community Wood Recycling ensures **100%** of wood waste from our construction sites is diverted from landfill
- **95%** of the products we buy from Ethstat, who supply our PPE and office supplies, are plastic free and all carbon neutral
- We're looking to improve air quality on our estates and have installed a wall made from moss and other plants that absorb harmful pollutants at one of our Independent Living schemes. The wall was developed by engineers, FortyTwo, and Staffordshire County Council, who are monitoring the positive effects on both health and the environment.



Many of these organisations are also social enterprises, which means they invest their profits back into supporting communities.





**Bringing
positive
change to
places and
communities**



Estate Services

Our Estate Services teams responded quickly to the pandemic and continued to deliver grounds maintenance and cleaning services throughout the year. We adapted our working practice to maintain high standards, whilst ensuring both our customers and employees remained safe in our buildings.

- Greg Birch, Head of Property Management and Estate Services

Cleanliness and sanitising became more crucial than ever and our teams worked tirelessly to keep schemes clean and safe. We increased the frequency of our cleaning rotas, particularly in Independent Living schemes where customers may be more vulnerable.

- Over **6,000** cleaning and grounds maintenance quality inspections were carried out – **25%** more than last year
- We achieved an **89%** average quality score out of 100, a **1.5%** increase from the previous year (against a target of **85%**)
- We also took a further **12%** of cleaning and grounds maintenance services in-house, which saved over **£100,000**.

Helping improve our environment

Keeping your estates looking good is important to all of us and last year, we worked closely with Independent Living customers and put forward over 50 schemes for Britain in Bloom awards.

Last year saw us launch our first ever electric vehicle. Not only is it more cost effective to run, it also helps save the planet. We're looking to introduce more electric vehicles in the future, as we replace existing vehicles. We've also introduced battery powered lawn mowers, where our in-house team delivers grounds maintenance services directly to customers.

We worked closely with our Community Investment team and the Wildlife Trusts to complete an initial pilot of four biodiversity projects. This includes identifying and maintaining areas of green space with a diverse range of wildlife. We carried out a number of tree planting projects across all the areas where we work, in order to help offset our carbon footprint.



Estate Services - continued

Improving the way we work

We are constantly modernising the way we work, through investing in and training our people. Several of our Estate Services operatives have started City & Guilds grounds maintenance courses and The British Institute of Cleaning Science (BICS) cleaning training. We've also brought in our first ever 'horticultural apprentices' so they can learn how to care for your community and we can 'grow our own talent' at the same time.

We also increased the size of our support team, called 'The Hive', to support our frontline teams and provide a better experience for our customers.

We held several meetings with Engaged Customers to explain how we deliver our services and what service charges cover. This also helped us better understand customer priorities and provide more in-depth responses to queries.



Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

Our Customer Promise sets out a clear commitment to deliver the best customer experience. We value diversity, and we want to be easy to deal with, fair, and inclusive. With over 100,000 people living in our homes, we want to make sure our services, and how we interact with our customers, is representative of the diverse range of people who make up our communities.

- Sam Ghataora, Equality Diversity and Inclusion Officer

We believe in providing an environment for our customers, colleagues and partners that gives everyone an equal chance to live, learn and work free from discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and prejudice; an environment where everyone can thrive.

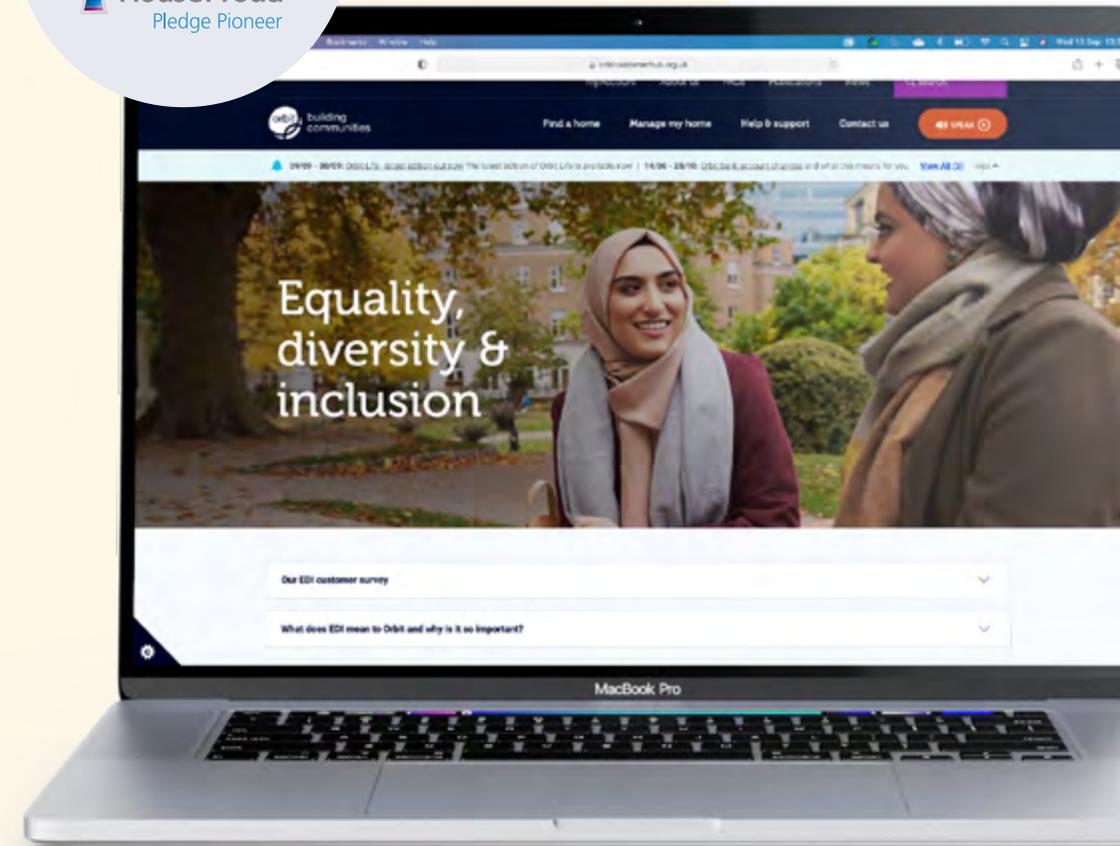
We've been working to bring EDI to the forefront of everything that we do:

- We are partnering with specialist EDI organisations, such as EQUIP Equality (who champion equality and diversity at home and in the community) so that we can review how we work and adopt best practice learning to make sure our services are accessible for everyone
- We've created an employee group of 'EDI Allies' who represent our diversity across Orbit, and help ensure Orbit is an inclusive place to work
- We're a member of the Housing Diversity Network, which consists of other housing providers, to work together by sharing information and learning so that together, we can all develop new ways of promoting diversity across the business.



Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) - continued

- We've created a brand-new **EDI webpage** that contains information about the work that we do and events we support throughout the year
- We have also created an EDI page on our Customer Engagement platform (Your Voice) so our customers can get involved and help shape improvements. If this is something that interests you, then please head over to Your Voice - we'd love to hear from you
- We signed up to the HouseProud Pledge February 2021. This outlines our commitment to supporting our customers and colleagues who represent the LGBTQ+ community
- We have delivered several events throughout the year, with a focus on creating wider awareness and inclusivity:
 - **LGBTQ+ History Month** (February) - Through a webinar that was open to customers and colleagues, one of our customers shared their experiences of being a member of the LGBTQ+ community and the obstacles and challenges they overcame to live their life authentically
 - **Dementia Awareness Week** (17 – 23 May) - Our Independent Living customers held events to raise awareness and money for the Alzheimer's Society. We've also supported customers and employees in becoming Dementia Friends
 - **Pride month** (June) - Independent Living customers held activities throughout the month to promote and celebrate Pride and the LGBTQ+ community. This included quizzes, bake sales, raffles and customers dressing up in the various colours of the Pride flag to show their support
 - We're celebrating **Black History Month** in October.





**Working
together for
a better day**



Better Days

We are proud to be more than just a landlord, and by funding additional support services through our **Better Days programme**, we are able to offer you help and advice in a number of ways. Last year, we supported over **3,000** people and this year, we want to help even more. Here's what some of our customers who received support from Better Days had to say:



"The Better Days team referred me to Breathing Space early on in the pandemic and they have been absolutely brilliant over the last few difficult months. Thank you to everyone who made that happen."

"My coach was just amazing. I was not getting anywhere with the job centre, but she helped me to get a job and plan for the future. Could not have done it without her!"

"I would like to thank you for my Super Surfer grant. I received a tablet and 'At Home Support' lessons to learn how to use it. It will help me keep in touch with my children and grandchildren in America, China and Manchester. Many thanks, much appreciated."

Better Days is a free service available to all our Orbit customers. We can provide help and support on a wide range of topics, including wellbeing and mental health, money advice and support, employment and digital skills. These are just some of the things we can help you with. To find out more, visit our website or contact us using the information below – we're here to help.

Visit: orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/help-support/ • Email: betterdays@orbit.org.uk

Text: **07860 017 857** • Phone: **0800 678 1221** and select **option 4**



Thriving Communities

“Our Thriving Communities team worked hard to enable our Better Days programmes to adapt and continue to provide invaluable advice and support services to our customers and communities throughout the pandemic. There was a big increase in online and phone support across the programme with an increase of 300% on the previous year.”

- Lucy McGovern, Head of Thriving Communities

To support this, our **digital support** and **digital grants programme** provided customers with digital equipment and training to get online and be able access vital services.



Our mental health support service, '**Breathing Space**', adapted to provide phone and online sessions to customers including women's groups, a young adults project and managing anxiety and stress.



In response to the pandemic, we invested **£40,000** into food banks and other welfare support projects during the initial stages of the pandemic to support customers and help ensure that nobody had to go without the basics. In January, we supported **20** local community projects through our Covid Recovery Fund, investing over **£150,000** to help communities to recover from the pandemic and access vital community resources. These included:

- Funding to enable a Day Centre in Newmarket, Suffolk to continue providing an essential food and meal service to the community during lockdown and be able to continue services beyond covid
- Support for a social supermarket covering Thanet District, Kent to move into a new facility, enabling them to open a community kitchen. In the last week in February, the new kitchen produced **850** meals which were sold at a subsidised cost. This led to a **150%** increase in users as well as delivering new online cooking skills lessons
- Resourcing a mental health project in Suffolk for young people, supporting children to deal with the effects of covid on their mental health through a digital upskilling course, counselling and a mental health ambassador scheme in schools.



Thriving Communities - continued

- Funding to bring live music to the doorsteps and gardens of older adults living in our sheltered and Extra Care accommodation in Rugby, Northamptonshire and Coventry, who were socially isolated and more vulnerable due to the impact of the pandemic.

Nearly 60% more customers accessed our **Better Days programmes** than in the previous year, achieving some amazing outcomes, including:

- o Customers successfully managed nearly **£1 million** of debt through independent debt advice
- o Last year, **840** customers were financially better off by an average of **£2,978** per household through the support they received from our financial and employment support services
- o **914** customers were supported into jobs and employment related training or volunteering
- o **559** customers improved their mental wellbeing and reduced their social isolation.

Customer satisfaction with **Better Days** was excellent, with **98%** of our customers expressing satisfaction with the support they received.

We also secured nearly **£1.6m** of external investment to enable us to reach more people and make a real difference to our customers and communities.

If you would like to find more about the many support services we provide **[click here](#)**.



Tenancy Sustainment

Early on in the pandemic, we reached out to help our most vulnerable customers. Our team made over 5,000 wellbeing calls, and referred 5,279 customers to our support services, so that the people who needed us most received the additional support they required.

- Nicola Kantas, Head of Tenancy Sustainment

We supported thousands of Orbit customers in what has, for many of us, been the most difficult time of our lives. Last May, we moved our face-to-face services online so we could continue to offer support and coaching to both existing and new customers. This included our group and 1-2-1 coaching, employment support, and all training programmes offered by our third-party partners. The team was proud to be able to continue their work to help people sustain their tenancies, improve their financial positions, and move into training and employment, ensuring they were better off than before they reached out to us.

To find out how our Tenancy Sustainment team can help you, please visit:
orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/help-support/

Key achievements this year:

- **592 (100%)** of new customers deemed as needing additional support when they began their tenancies with us, sustained their tenancies for at least 12 months
- We delivered a total of **3,039** coaching sessions on jobs, training and volunteering
- We referred **5,279** customers to additional support services, with **55%** being at first point of contact to gain the right support, first time. **2,365** of those referrals were directly supported by a Tenancy Sustainment Job coach
- **76%** of customers who received Tenancy Sustainment coaching have the same, or improved, their rent balance (an increase of **19%** since 2019-20)
- We helped **101** customers find employment.





Get in touch:

You can visit our website:
orbitcustomerhub.org.uk

Or to talk to us, please call:
0800 678 1221

For more information, please contact us at:
orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/contact

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please contact us on **0800 678 1221**

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